19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

764 the jingling of silver, probably bracelets, beads, rings, and other jewelry. It is said that hollow trees and the limestone caves that are so common in the hills of Burma and Siam, contain many such hidden treasures. In the Pegu Hills the people appear to bury the relics of their dead wherever fancy dictates and to pay no further attention to the spot. Indeed, as a whole the Karen raise no monuments over their dead. When the remains of a woman are buried, not only her trinkets and ornaments are buried with her, but also her pigs and fowls which, as her peculiar property, are killed and deposited with her relics.

766 775 Both in the hills and on the plains it is the custom to dig up the bones of the dead who have been carried off by epidemics, as well as of those who have died at inconvenient times, and hold ceremonies over them. It is said that in Shwegyin December ("La plü"), which is the month of eclipses and of the dead, is the time when these ceremonies are usually performed. On the plains the months of the hot season are those chosen for these rites.

When the bones are brought back to serve as the center of the burial ceremonies, they are placed in a little basket and set within [346] a small enclosure. In the Pegu Hills they are put under a small canopy, but on the plains the receptacle for them is made in the form of a miniature pagoda ("hko so law") or a little hut ("hko saw"). The hut is a model of a house with its ladder, water pots, etc. The basket containing the bones is put into the hut, and one end of a string is tied to the basket and the other let down into a water jar under the miniature house. This arrangement makes it possible for the "k'la" of the deceased to go down for a drink whenever it is thirsty. Early in the morning one of the elders carries a firebrand out to the hut, which is usually situated outside of the village. There he lifts out a piece of the bone and heats it with the glowing brand, saying: "If you are hot, sit by the fire." Then he pours water over it and tells it to drink and bathe, if it is cold. This he does in turn with each fragment of the bone. Finally, he puts the firebrand under the hut, calls back his own "k'la," and returns home. On top of the hut an image of a parrot is left, in case the deceased is an unmarried person; but for married persons two such images are set up. These birds are supposed to help carry the spirit of the deceaseed to its next abiding-place. As long as the bones are in the hut the friends take food to the "k'la" every day.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

If the deceased is unmarried, the friends sometimes chant poems deriding him for dying before he has left any offspring to perpetuate his stock on earth. When they are ready to carry the hut to the grave, they remove the image of the parrot ("t'le") and bury it at the fork of the roads with its head towards the jungle, probably so that it will fly in that direction and carry the "k'la" of the deceased into the woods. On their return the love poems ("na do") are chanted by the young men and maidens, and early next morning the hut with the little basket of bones inside is taken to the back of the usual burying-place and left there. The funeral party stops long enough to say: "We have brought you here with all your belongings. Remain here." On their way home they do not forget to call their "k'las" frequently, lest these should be tempted to stay behind. In the case of the burial of married persons the mourners cook eggs, rice, and curry and spread a feast near the hut. They request the spirit of the dead to come and eat and then to depart to the king of spirits, "Mü Hka," and not to return. The hut and its contents are then removed to the burial-place and left there. The closing ceremony is one performed over the bones at noon of the last day of the rites, its object being to discover whether the "k'la" of the departed has yet reached the land of delight whence it will not return, or whether it is still wandering around and, therefore, liable to entice away the "k'las" of its relatives and friends. This final ceremony is called "t'yaw lo ke a' k'la." A slender bamboo or stock of elephant grass is stuck in the ground obliquely near the foot of the hut, and from its top is suspended a newly spun cotton string on which is tied a piece of the charred bone of the dead person and below it a bit of cotton wool. Four or five more pieces of bone separated by bits of the wool are strung on the cord, the end of which is attached to a gold or yellow bracelet. Directly under the bracelet a cup containing a boiled duck egg and a lump of cooked rice is set. The relatives now sit down and chant a poem or "hta," in which their love for the deceased is expressed. Then each member of the family strikes the cup and bracelet a gentle blow and, calling the dead by name, asks his spirit to return. If nothing unusual happens, they know that it has arrived at its destination and will never come back again. If, however, the string vibrates considerably or breaks, as may happen, when somebody taps the bracelet there is great lamentation for they are then convinced that the "k'la" is present and has descended

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

the string. Hence, offerings of food must be continued to prevent the "k'la" from exercising its enticing power on that of some living relative.

The "k'las" of the children are thought to be especially susceptible to such influence, and among the Bwes extraordinary precautions are taken to protect the children. The Bwe grandmother, who is head of the "Bgha" feast, wraps a pair of fowls in a number of garments, each of her grandchildren supplying one. She then calls back the spirits of the children to prevent them from being attracted by the "Mü xa." After the necks of the fowls have been wrung their flesh is eaten by the family, while the "Mü xa" are supposed to feed upon the essence of the chickens.

The Karen bury their children soon after death, and seem to take no further notice of their passing. When parents have had the misfortune to lose several of their offspring shortly after birth, they believe that the spirits from some vague region have sought mortal birth through their instrumentality, simply to gain the ornaments and trinkets that Karen are in the habit of giving to their children. Having secured these coveted possessions, the spirits return to their former abode with their undeserved rewards. The Karen call this fleeting existence "ta plu aw ka," which means "gaining something by entering life." Parents thus taken advantage of, as they feel, have recourse to a revolting method of terrifying a spirit of this greedy type. After a child has died and been carried to the burial-place, the indignant father thrusts a spear or sword through and through the little body or slashes it with a "dah," that is, a long knife, in the hope that the spirit, seeing how badly its temporary mortal tenement is being treated, may fear to come back again.

Our study of funeral customs among the Karen shows that, in the case of adults at least, funerals are festal and feasting occasions. Much rice and pork curry are consumed and, in the olden time, liquor flowed freely. In earlier times when people of different villages met at a funeral, a spirit of rivalry was shown in the improvising and chanting of the poems and sometimes in other ways. I have in my possession an old bronze funeral drum, which was reputed to be the sweetest sounding drum in the hills at the head of Thonze Creek.[6] On its rim "dah" cuts appear which are the lasting marks of a fight in which rival groups of villagers engaged

[6] See Chapter XIII on Bronze Drums, pp. 121-122.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

"Hkü Te" is to be seen as a rainbow in the west occasionally. At such times, according to one version of the legend, he is lowering a tube through which to drink the liquor provided at wedding-feasts. When a rainbow appears in the west early in the morning, the king of hades is again in the sky, this time setting up a funeral post ("t le") for his children.[6] From this it seems that he has had several offspring, but his wife has never borne him any since their son-in-law thwarted their plot against his life in the remote past. The funeral post is intended to remind men that many persons have died without receiving proper burial ceremonies. Such neglect entails some sort of a calamity. Hence, the Karen are stricken with terror when they observe the rainbow arching the western heavens early in the morning, especially if this sign is accompanied by thunder and earthquake. Under such circumstances they will not go to their work, for it is tabu.[7] If a Karen should point at such a rainbow, he would at once thrust his finger into his navel in order to avoid the loss of the offending member. This act is called "ugh de de."

The people say of the rainbow in the east that at the time "Teu Kweh," wife of "Hkü Te," became the bow of promise in the sky she was pregnant, and, being now separated from the earth, she is seen from time to time in the east going to draw water for herself. The souls of women who die with child are supposed to have no other means of obtaining drink, except from the rainbow divinity. When two rainbows appear in the east, the upper and larger one is her husband, who is visiting with her.

The second group of spirits among the Karen comprises those who have spent some time on earth as human beings, but have not gained entrance into the realm of the dead because they were denied funeral rites either on account of their bad character or on account of their having died by violence. Hence they are doomed to wander about, avenging themselves upon mortals. As they are supposed to be particularly occupied with this mission at nightfall, the Karen think it imprudent to be out during the early evening.

This division consists of three groups of beings. The first are "Th' re ta hka," or ghosts of those who have died violent deaths or have been carried off by epidemics of cholera, smallpox, etc. and could not, therefore, be given proper funeral ceremonies. They are believed to bring violent deaths and epidemics upon mortals, prob-

[6] See Chapter XX on Funeral Customs, p. 266.
[7] See Chapter XXVIII on Tabu, p. 289.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

ably in revenge for the manner of their own taking-off. The second group is made up of those who were notoriously evil in the earthly life and suffered capital punishment for their crimes, and of those who as chiefs were known to be tyrants. This group as a whole is called "Ta mü xa."[8] Its members appear in the forms of giants and goblins or of Burman "pongyis" (Buddhist monks) and are usually seen by sick persons whose spirits ("k'las") they are seeking and on which they subsist.[9] These demons are attended by dogs in the form of woodpeckers. According to a legend two men, who were detained in the forest until night, heard a woodpecker call, and immediately thereafter they heard some ghosts say that the dog had barked. One of the men shouted, but they could distinguish nothing but some remark about monkeys, followed by the sound of a bowstring. The pair being thus discovered by the woodpecker, which was evidently with the demons, were stricken with a chill and died the next morning. Consequently, when a Karen hears the scream of this bird of ill-omen, he calls out:

"Shun me; stay far off.
Go thine own way; keep thine own road."

The third group of the ghosts of mortals consists of those who, through some accident, have been deprived of the funeral ceremonies. This group was discovered ages ago through the distressing experience of a certain patriarch, who came upon the body of a Talain who had been struck by lightning. He carried off the skull, took it home, and put it up over his fireplace. During the night the death's-head assumed human form and wandered all over the house, thereby striking terror into the members of the family. Before morning it resumed its former shape. The ghosts of people thus accidentally killed and left unburied are called "Ta t' hka" or "Ta s' hka." They inspire the Karen with horror, a fact taken advantage of by some miscreants who work evil on their enemies by means of a skull kept for the purpose. However, such working of evil falls within the realm of magic.[10]

The third general division of spirits comprises a heterogeneous lot of divinities, who exercise more or less influence on the life and prosperity of men. Some of these may have been inherited from

[8] The Karen designation of this group differs in pronunciation from that of the celestial beings (Mü xa) not only in having three syllables, but also in that its last syllable has the grave or heavy tone, while in the latter case "xa" is given the rising or light tone.

[9] For the rites in connection with these, see p. 240.

[10] See Chapter XXVI on Magic, p 274.